

Benjamin House  
(Judge Reuban Peterson House) (Dronningensgade 48)  
48 Queen Street  
Frederiksted  
St. Croix Island  
Virgin Islands

HABS No. VI-45

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BENJAMIN HOUSE  
(Judge Reuban Peterson House)

HABS No. VI-45

48 Queen Street, Frederiksted, St. Croix

1 - 2½ Stories

Brick and wood frame

L-shaped -- 52' x 60'

GENERAL STATEMENT

Architectural Character:

The Benjamin House is typical of the smaller early 19th-century residential structures of the Danish Virgin Island towns.

The general appearance indicates that it has not departed greatly from its original design. Finishes, however, are much altered and only a small percentage of the hardware is original.

Condition of Fabric:

The building is in good to fair condition. It is structurally sound and finishes are generally in good shape.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

EXTERIOR

Foundations:

The building rests on rubble and brick masonry foundations. The foundations articulate with the Queen Street wall by means of a slightly projecting plinth. In the ell the foundations take up the slope of the lot and are raised from 5' to 3' above ground level.

Wall Construction:

The wing towards the street is brick laid in common bond through two stories. The lower story is plastered while the upper is lime washed. The gable ends of the street wing and the <sup>ell</sup> are sheathed wood frame, clapboarded or shingled, respectively.

The interior partitions are masonry in the main wing and wood frame in the ell. The street side and the north gable end of the wing has a three-course horizontal band at 2nd floor height. Towards the street the

building has a ground floor arcade that extends north of the main wing and supports a terrace in the corners formed by the main wing and the offset of the ell. The arcade has six arches, five of which support the main block of the house and the other supporting the entrance porch. The former consist of three equilateral arches flanked by two semielliptical arches, while the latter is equilateral in design.

A wrought-iron balcony on scrolled brackets extends over the 3 center arches. The rear of the main wing has a two-story, lean-to, open gallery. The second story of this gallery continues in an open lean-to gallery along the north side of the ell.

Openings:

The street wing is 5 bays long by 3 bays deep. The ell is 5 bays long by 1 bay deep.

Doorways:

All exterior doors have double three-panel shutters and double jalousie doors divided into three sections with a solid panel in the lower section.

Windows:

The windows have double 3- or 2-panel shutters and double interior jalousie sash. Towards the street the second floor windows have 12 light, double-hung, glazed sash set between the jalousy and the shutters. The latter extend to the floor.

Roof:

The ell has a  $45^{\circ}$  straight gable roof with an extension over the gallery on its north side. It is corrugated metal on wood rafters. The main wing has a hipped roof and three-gabled dormers on the street side. It has corrugated metal roofing on wood rafters. Towards the rear it is extended over the gallery by a shed roof with a slighter pitch. The pitch of the main roof is between  $45^{\circ}$  to  $50^{\circ}$ .

There are no cornices and the eaves extend slightly over the walls.

**Chimneys:**

A brick chimney over an open range is located at the west end of the ell.

**Porches:**

As mentioned above the street wing has a two-story gallery towards the yard that continues into an open gallery along the north side of the ell.

The galleries have rails with diagonal cross-braces.

INTERIOR

**Floor Plan:**

The ground floor of the main wing has two rooms in a row extending the full depth of the building. The second story has two rooms with a stairhall in the northwest corner.

The ell contains four service rooms. The rooms open into each other.

In addition the galleries serve as hallways for intercommunication between all rooms.

**Stairways:**

An exterior plastered brick stairway with wrought-iron rails and bronze finial ornaments leads from the street to the 2nd-story terrace north of the street wing. An open wood staircase connects the courtyard with the gallery of the ell. A wood interior staircase in the northwest corner of the main wing connects the 2nd and 3rd floors.

**Floor:**

The street gallery and the terrace have brick pavements, the ground floor interior has concrete pavements. All other floors have tongue-and-groove pine flooring.

Wall & Ceiling Finish:

The interior masonry walls are plastered and painted or papered. Wood frame walls are sheathed and finished in the same manner. Except for the second floor of the main wing, the ceilings have exposed finished structural members, beams or rafters. On the second floor the ceilings are finished wood sheathing with a small cornice moulding.

Doors & doorways:

The interior doors where they occur are three-panelled double wing doors with trimmed casings. In addition to the cornice moulding already mentioned, the rooms have baseboards and pannelled recesses below the windows towards the street.

Hardware:

The shutters are equipped with wrought-iron strap hinges, storm hooks, sill and head hooks and bar brackets.

Doors and jalousy windows have wing hinges, stamped iron surface bolts of recent manufacture, porcelain door knobs and exposed box locks.

In addition to the stairs, rails and balcony previously mentioned, the building has a wrought-iron picket fence within the four center arches of the ground floor arcade.

Lighting:

Electricity. No signs of previous modes of illumination.

Heating:

There are no heating plants beyond the open charcoal kitchen range.

OTHER

General Setting:

The building is located on a city lot measuring 60' by 130'. The street wing with terrace extends from lot line to lot line. The L is built on

the south borderline of the lot to more than half the depth of the lot. The courtyard between the two wings is accessible by a driveway through the north arch of the street elevation. Behind the courtyard is an informal garden area, with the ruins of a masonry bake oven and an unidentified structure. A cistern is located below the ell at the juncture of the ell and the main wing. The entire lot is surrounded by a masonry wall from 4' to 6' tall.

Prepared by P. C. Gjessing

October 30, 1959